

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ADP-00 IO-13 NEA-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00

NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 RSR-01

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1403

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

CINCPAC

CINCPACREP CANBERRA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 4208

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, SEATO

SUBJ: FURTHER AUSTRALIAN COMMENTS ON SEATO TRAINING EXERCISE

PX 49

REF: A) STATE 149072 B) CANBERRA 3402 C) BANGKOK 11426 (NOTAL)

FOR EA/ANP FOR DELIVERY AT OPENING OF BUSINESS JULY 30.

1. SUMMARY: AUSTRALIAN DFA TELLS US THAT AUSTRALIA IS NOT PREPARED TO ANSWER QUESTION OF PARTICIPATION IN SEATO EXERCISE PX-49 UNTIL COMPLETION OF SEATO REVIEW AT COUNCIL MEETING IN NEW YORK. GOA MIGHT CONSIDER EXERCISES IF SCENARIO NOT OFFENSIVE TO CHINA AND IF NOT RPT NOT RELATED TO ROLES IN SEATO CONTINGENCY PLANS. FUTURE SEATO EXERCISES MIGHT USEFULLY AVOID SEATO LABEL, AS VILLAGE DEFENSE AND DEVELOPMENT SEMINARS DO NOW. END SUMMARY.

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2. EMBASSY REVIEWED WITH DFA (BIRCH, ASSIST. SECY., DEFENSE POLICY BRANCH) JULY 30 POSSIBILITY OF AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION IN SEATO EXERCISE PX-49 IF DEFERRED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AND CONDUCTED IN QTE UNEXCEPTIONABLE LOCATION END QTE. BIRCH REPLIED THAT PROBLEM WAS NOT WITH EXERCISE ITSELF BUT RATHER WITH TIMING ONE MONTH AFTER SEATO COUNCIL MEETING AT WHICH RANGE OF SEATO ACTIVITY IS TO BE CONSIDERED. ONCE SEATO REVIEW COMPLETED TO SATISFACTION OF PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES, BIRCH SAID, PS-49 MIGHT WELL BE CONCEIVABLE FOR AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION, PROVIDED SCENARIO COULD NOT RPT NOT BE CONSTRUED AS ANTI-CHINESE AND IF LOCALE, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS AWAY FROM SOUTH COAST OF CHINA.

3. BIRCH SAID THAT DFA HAS RECENTLY COMPLETED REVIEW OF SEATO ACTIVITY, AND ITS CONCLUSIONS, AS THEY AFFECT MILITARY EXERCISES, ARE LARGELY AS FOLLOWS. SEATO EXERCISES TO DATE GIVE FORCES AND COMMANDERS ROLES THEY WOULD HAVE UNDER SEATO CONTINGENCY PLANS. AUSTRALIA WOULD NOT BE PREPARED TO ENTER INTO EXERCISES DEVELOPED IN DIRECT CONNECTION WITH SEATO PLANS. HOWEVER, AUSTRALIA FAVORS MILITARY EXERCISES IN PRINCIPLE, PARTICULARLY MULTILATERAL EXERCISES WHICH REFLECT AUSTRALIA'S CONTINUING INTEREST IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

4. BIRCH STATED THAT AUSTRALIA WOULD NOT BE PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN EXERCISES INVOLVING DEPLOYMENT OF GROUND FORCES, PARTICULARLY IF THEY CONCERNED IMPLEMENTATION OF SEATO PLANS. HOWEVER, AUSTRALIA COULD PARTICIPATE IN MARITIME EXERCISES DESIGNED TO MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE OPERATIONAL READINESS OF NAVAL FORCES. AUSTRALIA APPRECIATES THAT IT WOULD NOT BE EASY OR INEXPENSIVE TO PLAN AND SCHEDULE SUCH MARITIME EXERCISES WITHOUT SEATO STAFF COORDINATION. WHETHER A GIVEN EXERCISE HAS A SEATO LABEL OR NOT IS A DIFFERENT MATTER. BIRCH NOTED THAT SEATO PRESENTLY HOLDS VILLAGE DEFENSE AND DEVELOPMENT SEMINARS WITHOUT A SEATO LABEL, A CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH HAS MADE THEM PLATABLE TO INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA.

5. BIRCH SAID THAT AUSTRALIA WOULD NOT ATTEND FUTURE MEETINGS OF SEATO MILITARY PLANNERS AND WOULD NOT MAKE FORCE DECLARATIONS TO SEATO.

6. COMMENT: APPEARS TO US THAT AUSTRALIANS ARE QUITE SERIOUS IN ATTACHING PRIMARY IMPORTANCE TO REVIEW OF SEATO ACTIVITIES
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AS PROVIDING GUIDELINE FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES OF ORGANIZATION. EVIDENT THAT GOA WILL NOT RPT NOT MAKE AD HOC DECISIONS ON SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF SEATO (E.G., MILITARY EXERCISES) IN ADVANCE OF COMPLETION OF REVIEW.

7. ISSUE FOR U.S. IS WHETHER WE WANT AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION IN PX-49 IN SOME FORMULATION OR WHETHER IT IS IMPORTANT FOR OTHER REASONS TO GO FORWARD WITH EXERCISE AS PRESENTLY CONCEIVED.

IF WE WANT AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION IN THIS EXERCISE, PX-49 SHOULD BE POSTPONED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, SCENARIO SHOULD BE REVIEWED TO ELIMINATE ANY POSSIBILITY OF OFFENSE TO PRC, AND LOCALE MIGHT BE SHIFTED, FOR EXAMPLE, TO PHILIPPINE SEA AREA EAST OF LUZON OR TO SOUTH CHINA SEA BETWEEN MALAYSIA, INDONESIAN BORNEO, AND SOUTH VIET-NAM. IF IT IS IMPORTANT TO GO FORWARD WITH EXERCISE AS PRESENTLY CONCEIVED, IT SHOULD BE RECALLED THAT AUSTRALIA HAS NOT ASKED US TO CANCEL BUT HAS SIMPLY WITHDRAWN FROM PARTICIPATION. IF SATISFACTORY CONCEPT FOR FUTURE SEATO ACTIVITY IS DEVELOPED, AUSTRALIA MAY WELL BE PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN EXERCISES, BEARING IN MIND GUIDELINES NOTED ABOVE.

8. I REVIEWED OTHER ASPECTS OF AUSTRALIAN THINKING ON SEATO WITH BLAKENEY OF DFA JULY 30. GOA UNDER WHITLAM HAS COME LONG WAY FROM NEGATIVE VIEWS IT HELD ON SEATO SIX MONTHS AGO. AUSTRALIAN PARTICIPATION IN SEATO AND IN AT LEAST MARITIME EXERCISES SEEMS ASSURED, EVEN THOUGH DETAILS REMAIN TO BE WORKED OUT. A LEANER SEATO MAY BE HEALTHIER FOR THE LONG RUN.
HARROP

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 JUL 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: smithrj
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973CANBER04208
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: CANBERRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t1973074/aaaaackk.tel
Line Count: 134
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: smithrj
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 DEC 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <31-Jul-2001 by shawdg>; WITHDRAWN <16-Oct-2001 by eisnerah, 3.4.X6>; RELEASED <12-Dec-2001 by smithrj>; APPROVED <13-Dec-2001 by smithrj>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FURTHER AUSTRALIAN COMMENTS ON
TAGS: MARR, SEATO
To: SECSTATE WASHDC BANGKOK LONDON MANILA WELLINGTON CINCPAC CINCPACREP CANBERRA
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005